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ABSTRACT

Two notions about the delivery of services to disadvantaged, deprived, and mildly retarded children were advanced: (1) that insufficient attention has been given to the fact that certain special education labels imply deficiencies and shortcomings in children, and (2) that no systematic inquiry has been made of children's perceptions of the labels and services offered them. Analyses of data from several studies involving more than 10,000 public school students, graduates, and dropouts, college students, prospective and inservice teachers, and counselors revealed that: (1) children reject the labels culturally disadvantaged and culturally deprived as descriptive of themselves; (2) acceptance of such labels was associated with lowered school attitudes; (3) teachers hold lowered expectations for performance of the deprived and disadvantaged child; (4) educable mental retardates report (and teachers confirm) stigma associated with special class placement; and, (5) few strategies for the management of stigma in classes for the educable mentally retarded have been developed by teachers. (Author)

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Abstract

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Analyses of data from several studies involving more than 10,000 public school students, graduates, and dropouts; college students; prospective and inservice teachers; and counselors revealed that (1) children reject the labels culturally disadvantaged and culturally deprived as descriptive of themselves, (2) that acceptance of such labels was associated with lowered school attitudes, (3) that teachers hold lowered expectations for performance of the deprived and disadvantaged child, (4) that educable mental retardates report (and teachers confirm) stigma associated with special class placement, and that (5) few strategies for the management of stigma in classes for the educable mentally retarded have been developed by teachers.

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Labels and Stigma in Special Education

Reginald L. Jones

The present paper treats the problem of labels and stigma in special education. The concerns are limited to those labeled educable mentally retarded, culturally disadvantaged, and culturally deprived who constitute the largest groups of exceptional children in the schools. There is some impressionistic and hearsay evidence, however, to suggest that other groups of exceptional children in the schools are stigmatized by the special class placement and keenly feel the effects of the negative disability labels (i.e., those in classes for the mildly emotionally disturbed, neurologically impaired, learning disabled, and trainable mentally retarded). It is suspected that many of the findings of the present investigation will apply to these groups.

Inclusion of the "culturally disadvantaged" and "culturally deprived" as special education categories can be debated. They have been included in one recent textbook on the psychology and education of exceptional children, however, and do represent a deviation sufficient to suggest the need for special curriculum adaptations.

The central theme of the paper is that deficiencies exist in the delivery of services to exceptional children in two important respects:

(1) insufficient attention has been given to the fact that some of the labels used imply deficiencies and shortcomings which generate attendant problems of lowered self concept and expectations which interfere with children's optimum growth and development and,

(2) no systematic inquiry has been conducted into children's

perceptions of the labels and special services which we offer them.

There is growing recognition that these are indeed problem areas as indicated by two recent nationwide conferences on the labeling and categorizing issues in special education, by the growing number of local conferences and workshops for teachers and psychologists in which these topics are key issues, and by modified training patterns in institutions for the education of teachers and school psychologists to deal with these problems.

Unfortunately, this flurry of activity is characterized by a curious absence of empirical foundation for the efforts. For example, there is no documentation of the extent of the problem of labels and stigma as perceived by teachers, pupils, school administrators, citizens, and parents. There is no documentation of strategies designed to deal with these problems -- empirically based or otherwise. And insofar as this writer has been able to determine, not a single empirical study has been reported in the literature dealing with labels and stigma in public school populations of exceptional children. Given these deficiencies, it is apparent that data in these areas are sorely needed if we are to plan effectively for the delivery of service to exceptional children on a sounder base than has been the case heretofore. One purpose of the present paper is to provide some results from a program of research devoted to the above problems.

The concern about labels and stigma in special education has been stimulated by minority groups, particularly blacks and Mexican-Americans (browns), who point to the disproportionate numbers of their members in special classes for the mentally retarded and to the stigma associated

Labeling Children Culturally Deprived and Culturally Disadvantaged

The current descriptive term for the child of lower socioeconomic background, usually of black or other minority status, is culturally disadvantaged or culturally deprived. Many current textbooks and articles describe the "deprived" and "disadvantaged" child's presumed cognitive, motivational, affective, demographic, and background characteristics. Like other exceptional children he is characterized missing something necessary for successful school performance. Seldom have the consequences of the labels used to describe the child been explored. The present section takes up this task and deals with the following questions. Do children of whatever socioeconomic background label themselves culturally deprived or culturally disadvantaged or accept such labels? What are the consequences in terms of school attitudes, motivation, and self concept associated with the acceptance of the labels? What affective responses to these labels? What cognitive understanding of the terms? What consequences in terms of teacher and counselor behavior and expectations? What consequences in terms of student performance? These are some of the questions that must be dealt with as we attempt to explore the effects of labels on the child. While the present concern is with the terms culturally disadvantaged and culturally deprived, it is apparent that similar questions must be asked for the more conventional categories of exceptional children.

That these terms are felt keenly by blacks is indicated in a recent paper by Dr. Kenneth Clark, first black president of the American Psychological Association, who wrote (1969):

> Although I reveal a certain cynicism by this, I find myself constantly thanking God that when I was in the Harlem public schools nobody knew that I was culturally deprived. I'm afraid that if they did know I would not have been taught on the grounds that being culturally deprived I wouldn't be able to learn (p. 36).

Similarly Johnson, a black special educator, has written (1969):

> When we speak of inner city, or ghetto or core area and when we use euphemisms such as educationally disadvantaged, culturally deprived, and poverty-ridden, we are really talking about Black people or Afro-Americans...I am suggesting that education has failed in its responsibilities to Black Americans. What then about special education which has long been involved in educational endeavors in the inner cities?
>
> Its Black clientele has been labeled delinquent and retarded, thus helping the general educational enterprise to avoid some of the responsibility for its failure to adapt to individual and collective needs. Basically this labeling process imputes a lack of ability or a lack of values which are acceptable to the schools.
>
> The rule of thumb for Black Children is: IQ below 75 = learning problem or stupidity; and IQ above 75 = behavior problem or crazy.

Children's perceptions of themselves as culturally disadvantaged and culturally deprived. A survey of one large metropolitan school district (Jones, 1970a) in the midwest was undertaken in which some 7252 children in grades 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 12 were requested to give a variety of self-perceptions -- e.g., Do you see yourself as culturally disadvantaged? Do you see yourself as middle class? Do you see yourself as lower class? etc. The subjects represented the entire school system and included 934 students in grade 4, 772 in grade 6, 1339 in grade 8, 1803 in grade 9, 1028 in grade 10, and 1376 in grade 12. Significant numbers of minority and lower socioeconomic students were represented permitting analyses on these dimensions. Such analyses were unnecessary, however since most students at all grade and socioeconomic levels rejected the labels as descriptive of themselves. Thus in schools where excessive numbers of mothers were receiving Aid to

with such placement. Their argument is that the minority child is doubly penalized by placement in special classes, first because of race or national origin, and secondly because of deficit labels leading to a stigmatizing placement. Data to support disproportionate placement of blacks and browns in special classes is well know. For example, blacks and browns comprised approximately 8 and 13 percent respectively of the pupils enrolled in the California public schools, but 26 and 26 percent (or 52 percent) of those enrolled in special classes for the mildly retarded (California State Department of Education, 1971).

The concern about the excessive placement of minority children in special classes for the mildly retarded extends beyond the fact of mere disporportionate representation. Rather the concern is with the consequences of such practices for the child including lowered self-concept, rejection by teachers, parents, and peers, and poor prospects for post school adjustment and employment. Professional special educators would add that the absence of demonstrated validity for self contained special classes combined with the arguments alluded to above are in themselves ample reasons for the demise of self contained classes for the educable mentally retarded. Some argue that this is a premature judgment, however, since there are several definable subgroups of minority children now being classified as educable mentally retarded; some students may well be most appropriately placed in the self contained special class (MacMillan, 1971). As these diverse points of view indicate, the appropriateness of various administrative plans for the educable mentally retarded remains an area of some controversy (Jones, 1971a).

Dependent Children and where virtually all children were lower SES blacks the label was rejected by as many students as was the case in predominantly white middle class schools. Most students of whatever social class perceived themselves as middle class. Insofar as the validity of responses was concerned, the subjects self descriptions were unrelated to a measure of social desirability. Using biserial correlations, no significant relationships were found between social desirability scores and self descriptions at any grade level. Confidence in the validity of the responses then is quite high.

The results are clear. Regardless of socioeconomic or grade level, children reject the labels culturally deprived and culturally disadvantaged as descriptive of themselves. The independence of the responses from measures of social desirability was confirmed. A related methodological question, however, concerns whether or not the respondents were familiar with certain of the terms used in the study -- e.g. culturally deprived, and culturally disadvantaged, among others. The concern is particularly relevant for our elementary school respondents. Did they know the meaning of these terms? Could they give satisfactory definitions of them?

A small study involving 259 students in grades 5 and 6 in several classrooms was undertaken in which the children were requested to give definitions of some 20 terms including key items of interest in the present investigation. Prior to a content analysis of responses the subjects were grouped into high, average, and low ability groups based on group intelligence test scores recorded in school records, and into low and middle class backgrounds based on teacher reports. Such

measures proved unnecessary, however, since virtually none of these young subjects could give satisfactory responses to the key terms culturally deprived and culturally disadvantaged.

Content analyses of these same terms, and others, were also carried out using some 2397 students in grades 9 and 12 in 24 junior and senior high schools. The results were remarkable, particularly with respect to omissions and tangential remarks given by subjects in some schools. Many older subjects could give reasonably satisfactory responses to these terms. A curious finding, however, was the tendency for many omissions and irrelevant or defensive terms to be given in certain schools. A clinical interpretation would lead to the conclusion that there was more defensiveness among the students in these largely black schools in responding to the terms culturally disadvantaged and culturally deprived.

Affective responses. It seemed reasonably clear that the younger respondents were unfamiliar with the terms culturally deprived and culturally disadvantaged. But what of affective responses to the terms? Do the terms hold certain denotative (affective and attitudinal) meanings for the children in spite of their inability to give satisfactory connotative or conventional definitions? It was suspected that at some level young elementary children are familiar with the terms and do have feelings about them. Test of this notion was undertaken using 49 black children in grades 3-6 in a small midwestern community. The subjects responded to a number of questions related to their affective perceptions of various labels -- e.g. if someone called you culturally disadvantaged, would that be good or bad? etc. The subjects responded to 19 different socioeconomic and class descriptive terms, the results of which are

presented in Table 1. As data in the Table reveal, the respondents

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Insert Table 1 about here

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perceived the terms culturally disadvantaged and culturally deprived as essentially negative descriptions with, respectively, 78 and 76 percent of the respondents indicating "bad" if the terms were used as descriptive of themselves. Additional data in Table 1 confirm previous suspicions about affective responses to certain other special education terms. Thus it is good to be gifted (agreed to by 74 percent of the respondents) but bad to be a slow learner or mentally retarded -- agreed to by, respectively, 96 and 92 percent of the respondents. Other data were confusing, e.g. the perception of the label black as bad, and the label colored as good. It has been assumed, based on current sloganeering, (i.e. black is beautiful) and the changing times, that a more favorable affective meaning would be attached to the term black than has been the case heretofore. Evidence exists that this is the case with older blacks (Dansby, 1971). Further exploration of the meaning of the findings for younger black populations should be the focus of additional work in this area.

Acceptance of deprivation labels and school attitudes. It is one thing to know that children reject the labels culturally deprived and culturally disadvantaged. A more important question relates to the consequences of acceptance or rejection of the labels, and school attitudes. Do children who label themselves culturally disadvantaged or culturally deprived hold lower school attitudes than those who see themselves -- regardless of objective circumstances -- as middle class? Using

Table 1

Student Reactions to Certain Socio-economic and

Class Descriptive Terms (N = 49)

Term	% of Ss Responding Good	% of Ss Responding Bad
Black	22	76*
Culturally Deprived	30	68
Culturally Disadvantaged	16	78
Deprived Area (lived in)	16	82
Colored	74	24
Headstart	34	64
Inner City (lived in)	66	28
Poverty	32	64
Lower Class	6	92
Mentally Retarded	6	92
Middle Class	66	30
Negro	76	22
Poor	4	94
Rich	94	4
Slow Learner	2	96
Slum School	2	96
Upper Class	94	4
White	10	88
Gifted	74	24

* Percentages do not add up to 100 because of omissions and rounding error.

biserial correlations, one study of 1706 children in grades 4 and 6 revealed reliably lower school attitudes (i.e. attitudes toward teacher pupil relationships, other pupils, the school plant, general feelings about school, etc.) for those who labeled themselves culturally deprived or culturally disadvantaged as opposed to those who labeled themselves middle class. The finding held across schools of varying socioeconomic classes and was independent of social desirability response sets (Jones, 1970a).

It does not seem unreasonable to speculate that similar relationships will be found between acceptance of deficit labels in other areas of disability (i.e. educable mentally retarded, educational handicap, etc.) and the respondent's school and self attitudes. This obviously is an area needing considerable additional investigation.

Labels and performance -- Two experiments. There has been no work which supports the belief that deficit labels actually effect the behavior of those labeled. If labels have deleterious effects as hypothesized by many special educators, it should be possible to demonstrate that learning and performance proceeds more slowly or inefficiently under a deficit label than under a neutral or a positive label. The present section presents the results of explorations of this hypothesis using experimental methods (Jones, 1970b).

Two studies on the effects of having black college students perform a digit symbol substitution task under various label conditions were undertaken. In the first, the Ss (who believed the digit symbol task to be a measure of Psychomotor Intelligence) completed the forms with one of three labels at the bottom of each page: (1) Study of Culturally Disadvantaged College Students; (2) Study of Black College Students; or

(3) Study of College Students. No attention was called to the labels in the instructions, and Ss under the three conditions were randomly assigned to the treatments within classrooms. Ss were 243 black college students in 3 predominantly black colleges -- two in the south (N's of 63 and 120) and one in the midwest (N = 60). The data from each school were treated separately. The hypothesis tested was that digit symbol performance would be highest for the Black College Student condition and lowest for the Culturally Disadvantaged conditions.

One way analyses of variance of total number of symbols correctly translated revealed no reliable differences ($p > .05$) in mean performance for Ss in the three conditions at any of the three schools, thus providing no support for the hypothesis (F's of 2.63, df 2/57; .54, df 2/117; and .26, df 2/60). A small followup pilot study revealed that few subjects could actually recall the labels.

A second study utilizing 100 different black students in two predominantly black midwestern colleges was designed as followup to the above studies. It was designed to mirror in a rigorous experimental fashion practices followed in present day schools -- i.e. a student is identified as having an educationally related deficiency and he is placed in some special program to remediate the deficiency. The possibility that the fact of placement may itself lead to a decrement in rather than a stimulus to performance has not been the object of serious investigation. The subjects were first given the digit symbol substitution test (said to be a measure of learning ability) under a non-label condition. About one week later the subject was informed via personal letter that he scored in the high group and that he would be given the advanced exercises to permit further improvement of his performance, or

that he had scored in the low group and hence remedial exercises would be given -- all to be followed by an immediate post-test to determine the effectiveness of the remedial or advanced exercises. To heighten awareness of the experimental variables the content of the letter, letterhead, and the signature line attempted to call attention to the treatments which were: (1) Study of Culturally Disadvantaged College Students (N = 25); (2) Study of Black College Students (N = 25); (3) Study of College Students (N = 25); or (4) Project Accelerate (N = 25). These labels were also placed at the bottom of each page of the intermediate (remedial or advanced) tests which were identical for the four treatments but a more difficult form of the digit symbol task than the pre or post-test. A post-test (identical to pretest) followed the intermediate exercises.

No reliable differences ($p > .05$) in pre-test performance were found. A one way analysis of variance of post-test scores revealed no reliable differences in digit symbol performance as a function of exposure to the treatments ($p > .05$).

Several possibilities may account for failure to support the hypothesis: (1) that the dependent measures were not sensitive to treatment effects; (2) a confirmed failure of subjects to attend to the labels; and (3) the fact that the subjects were college students, a somewhat homogeneous group, who may have been impervious to the suggestion that they possessed learning deficiencies. The need obviously is to carry out similar investigations using more heterogeneous public school populations.

Teacher expectations and labels. Teacher expectations about the performance of children can come to serve a self-fulfilling prophecy. Such

a possibility was brought to attention in a dramatic way by the research of Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968). The methods and conclusions of this study are by now well known and hence can be summarized briefly. A group of elementary school children were pretested with a standard nonverbal test of intelligence, the test being represented to the teachers as one that would predict intellectual blooming or spurting. Approximately twenty percent of the children in grades one through six were randomly identified as potential spurters. These children and others not so identified were retested with the same non-verbal I.Q. test after one semester, and after one and two academic years. The results were remarkable: students in the control group made some significant gains in I.Q. (19 percent gained 20 or more I.Q. points); forty-seven percent of the special children, however, gained 20 or more total I.Q. points.

The Rosenthal studies have been faulted on many methodological grounds (Barber and Silver, 1968a, 1968b, Thorndike, 1968). However, the results of related investigations suggest that teachers do hold low expectations for certain classes of students and that such expectations do relate to the ways in which teachers interact with their pupils.

Herriott and St. John (1966) based on interviews with a national sample of teachers and pupils in urban public schools report that the lower the socioeconomic status (SES) of the schools the smaller the proportion of teachers who held favorable opinions about the motivation and behavior of their pupils. (It will not escape the reader that a large majority of low SES schools in urban areas contain substantial

numbers of "disadvantaged" students). Moreover, these same teachers were less likely to report that they had personal loyalty to the principal, that they desired to remain at their present school or that they enjoyed their work. The finding concerning work satisfaction is particularly important since there is evidence which indicates that reported satisfaction in teaching is directly correlated with pupil school morale (Jones, 1968). Pearson Product moment correlations between eight indices of school morale and reported teacher satisfaction for 34 randomly selected teachers and their fourth grade students in 34 urban classrooms revealed significant correlations between reported satisfaction with teaching and (1) attitudes toward other pupils ($p < .01$), (2) pupil teacher relationships ($p < .05$), (3) general feelings about school ($p < .01$) and (4) general school morale ($p < .05$). Similar analyses were carried out with 28 sixth grade classrooms. However, no significant correlations were found between reported teacher satisfaction and any of the morale subscales. The results are clear: for young children, teacher satisfaction is related to pupil satisfaction. Unfortunately, it is not possible to know which group influenced which. Perhaps perceived poor pupil attitudes led to lowered satisfaction in teaching; or the situation could have been reversed with pupils responding to perceived poor teacher attitudes. Regardless of the order of development of the attitudes it seems reasonably clear that lowered satisfaction in work with young children is very closely tied to pupil satisfaction with school. Apparently, teacher satisfaction has the more powerful effect on pupil morale in the early grades.

The mediation of expectancy effects. What happens to the "culturally

disadvantaged" child in the classroom? If expectancy effects are operative at all, how are they mediated? Several studies have now examined the mechanisms through which expectancy effects become translated into actual teacher behavior. The first was that of Beez (1968). This experiment showed the effects of teacher expectation on pupil performance. Subjects were 60 teachers and 60 pupils in a Headstart program. Teachers taught each child the meaning of a symbol. Half the teachers had been given the expectancy that, based on a psychological appraisal of the chiod, good learning would occur; the remaining half were led to expect poor learning. The results were remarkable. Seventy-seven percent of those alleged to have good intellectual prospects learned five or more symbols, whereas only 13 percent of those alleged to have poor prospects achieved at this level. Moreover, teachers who had been given favorable expectations about their pupils actually attempted to teach more symbols than those teachers who had been given unfavorable expectations about their pupils.

Expectations cover not only subjective forecasts of pupil ability and motivation but extend to school attitudes as well. Expectations regarding the school attitudes of a "culturally disadvantaged" child held by a group of college students were investigated in a social cognition experiment (Jones, 1970a). Subjects were 119 female undergraduate students who volunteered to participate in a psychology experiment as part of an introductory psychology course requirement. Approximately 75 percent of the participants were prospective teachers. Seventy-five of the subjects (experimental group) were given the following instructions:

Social Cognition Experiment

This is a study to determine the way in which individuals make certain kinds of predictions about the responses of others.

Please fill out the enclosed inventory according to the instruction on the booklet. However instead of answering the questions as you normally would, answer as you think the person described below would respond.

A twelve year old culturally deprived boy in the 6th grade in an inner city school.

Remember, you are to answer as you feel this person would.

Please answer every question, even though you may sometimes find it difficult to make a decision.

A second group of 44 respondents (control group) received instructions, identical to those above except that the boy in the vignette was not described as inner city or culturally deprived. All subjects completed the School Morale Inventory (Wrightsman, 1968), an inventory designed to measure student feelings about school in a number of important areas, according to the directions given above. The inventory was scored in the conventional manner and the subtest scores given under the set to simulate the culturally deprived child compared (using t tests) with those given under the set to simulate the non-deprived child. The results were unequivocal (See Table 2); the deprived child was predicted to have reliably lower morale on all subscales of the School Morale Inventory, e.g., (1) morale about the school plant, (2) morale about instruction and instructional materials, (3) morale about administration, regulations, and staff, (4) morale about community support of schools and parental involvement in school, (5) relations with other students, (6) morale about teacher-student relationships, (7) general feelings about attending school, and (8) total school morale.

Insert Table 2 about here

The study was replicated with a group of experienced teachers and counselors who had completed a year of study in an institute devoted to preparing counselors of "culturally deprived" youth. The responses of these specialists were identical to those given by the undergraduate students: the school attitudes held by the "culturally deprived" were predicted to be reliably lower than those held by the "non-deprived." For both counselors and undergraduate subjects the cognitions given for the "deprived" child were considerably more discrepant than those actually given by children who could be so labeled. No pre-tests of counselor cognitions were obtained. It is difficult therefore to know the extent to which any changes took place in counselor attitudes toward the "deprived" as a function of the year long institute. It is entirely possible that counselor attitudes were even more negative than those found at the end of their training. Obviously, it is not now possible to obtain this information. It can be asserted only that following a full year of training devoted to the "culturally deprived" counselors held very negative and very stereotyped views of this group. If the program for counselors referred to above is any good at all, it suggests that prospects for modifying negative attitudes toward the "deprived" through formal training (including considerable field work) are not at all bright.

The results of investigations reported here reveal that children do reject the labels culturally deprived and culturally disadvantaged as descriptive of themselves. Acceptance of such terms as self descriptive

Table 2

School Attitudes Attributed to Culturally Deprived and Non-Deprived School Children

Attitude Subscale	Predicted Attitudes of Deprived N = 75 Mean	Predicted Attitudes of Non-Deprived N = 44 Mean
School Plant	3.15	6.37*
Instruction	2.36	4.77
Community	1.95	6.57
Administration, Regulations, and Staff.	2.56	5.01
Other Students	4.63	7.44
Teacher-Student Relationships	4.00	6.53
General School Morale	3.31	5.50
Total Morale	21.89	45.52

* All differences were significant at less than the .01 level. The maximum score for individual subscales is 12; Total morale, 84.

has been found to be associated with lowered attitudes toward school. Moreover, teachers and counselors hold clear stereotypes about the characteristics and attitudes of children so labeled. Unfortunately, most of these characterizations and stereotypes are negative. The spectre of the self-fulfilling prophecy is ever present.

What changes then do the results suggest? The need for modification of labeling practices in this area are clear, for as Clark (1969) observes:

> ...the most serious of all the obstacles which must be overcome is the tendency to label these youngsters, to name-call them, and to embark on the self-fulfilling prophecy of believing them to be uneducable by setting up social science and educational jargon which justifies this belief, setting up procedures and approaches which make education almost impossible, and then proving all of it by demonstrating that these children are retarded. If we are going to educate these children, this, I believe is the significant obstacle.

And finally, [Mackler and Giddings (1967)]:

> ...We must purge ourselves of the concept of cultural deprivation and all its derogatory implications. If a concept is needed, then we must seek a more accurate, authentic, and honest term. If we conclude that no term is needed perhaps that will be all the better.

Stigma, Stigma Management, and the Educable Mentally Retarded

The present section takes up the problem of stigma and stigma management in educable mental retardates as revealed by research into these areas. The section includes three parts. The first deals with the problem of stigma as perceived by retardates themselves, while the second treats teacher perceptions of stigma and techniques for its management. The third section looks at special classes from the perspective of the former special education student.

Retardate perceptions of stigma associated with special class placement. Aside from the pioneering study by Edgerton with former institutionalized retardates (1967), no research on stigma and stigma management associated with the mentally retarded appears to have been reported in the literature. There is, however, ample evidence to suggest the existence of negative stereotypes of the retarded (Guskin, 1963; Wilson, 1970). The studies reported in the aforementioned reviews, however, all deal with reports of attitudes of the non-disabled toward the retardate. It seems important in planning school programs for the educable mentally retarded to have some knowledge of retardate perceptions of his special class placement and of techniques which he uses to manage the fact of such placement. Heretofore, such information has not been available.

Research at the elementary school level (Meyerowitz, 1962) indicates that the young child's self concept drops following placement in a self contained special class for the educable mentally retarded. At the high school level, the self concept of the special class educable mental retardates was found to be lower than that of non-retarded students in regular classes (Jones, 1968). It is not possible to establish cause and effect relationships between special education placement and lowered self concept because of methodological problems in the above studies. The presumptive evidence, however, is that this is the case. Placement in a class for the mentally retarded is not a badge of distinction, and there is evidence which indicates that some stigma is associated with the placement. One high school educable retardate notes:

> ...I don't tell them (friends) I'm in special class. I didn't care last year (junior high school) but I do now because all these people make fun of me.

And another indicates:

> I don't like to see some of the (regular) students to come in here (to visit special class) because they're my friends and I don't want them to know I'm here.

A small pilot study on stigma and the management of stigma by a group of high school boys enrolled in a special class for the educable mentally retarded in a large midwestern city was revealing (Jones, 1970a). Seventeen of the 23 respondents lied when asked about their school work. Most said that they enrolled in regular, not special courses, indicating that they were not proud of their special class placement. Those elaborating on their responses indicated that they said regular work in order to avoid ridicule. Sixteen of the 23 respondents indicated that special education was disliked because they were made to feel different and made fun of. While most of the respondents expressed the view that visitors should be permitted to visit the classroom, there was an underlying reluctance to do so and some qualification of responses.

> "Yes and no." If they'd (special students) act right they'd (regular students) be allowed. Some of the people in here don't act right, and others don't want people to know its not like the regular classes.

Sixteen of the respondents indicated that they had received queries about being in special education. The nature of the queries was either to ask what goes on in special education or to make fun of their friend. The subjects usually attempted to cover up by saying that the work was the same and that they were graded in the same manner as in regular classes.

Seven of the 23 respondents indicated that being in the special class had changed their freindships. The effect of special class placement on friendships was limited, however, because many respondents had friends outside the special class. Of the respondents expressing the view that special class placement had a negative effect on their friendships, the most frequent reason was that others (i.e. regular students) saw the special class as inferior. Here is an example:

> Yes it has very much (i.e. placement in a special class has affected friendships). Some of my friends won't even talk to me because they think I'm too dumb and dilentary. I just tell them I don't give a damn about the other fellow. This is me and myself and I don't care what they think 'cause its not hurting me its hurting them.

For some males enrollment in a special class made it more difficult to keep a girlfriend:

> If you want a girlfriend, she won't like you 'cause you're in the special class. She'll think you're stupid and kinda weird. They think you're retarded. Girls mostly, some boys.

Eleven respondents saw the special class placement as having a negative effect on opportunities for post-school job placement, though students in work study programs were more optimistic in this regard. Fourteen of the 23 respondents were aware of techniques used to hide or cover the fact of special class placement. Eleven volunteered that they themselves practiced such strategies.

Thirteen of the respondents could think of nothing in school which made them happy with their special education placement, and 21 of the 23 respondents could think of no out-of-school event which led to satisfaction with such placement. Finally, not one of the 23 respondents indicated the special class as his preferred educational placement.

The results were followed up on some 116 additional educable

mental retardates in self contained classrooms in three midwestern cities at both the junior and senior high school with remarkably similar results suggesting, for the populations under study and undoubtedly others, that the phenomenon of stigma in non-institutionalized educable mental retardates is indeed real.

Teacher perceptions of the phenomenon and their strategies for its management are treated in the section following.

Teacher perception and management of stigma. If the problem of stigma is real as data from retardates themselves indicate, the question of how it was perceived by teachers and what, if anything, was being done about it seemed critical. Answers to these questions were dealt with in a questionnaire completed by a random sample of 317 Ohio elementary and secondary teachers of educable mental retardates. Space limitations will not permit full exploitation of the results of this investigation (Jones, 1971b). However, certain key findings are presented in Table 3, which summarizes evidence bearing on teacher awareness of stigma associated with special class placement, and teacher strategies for stigma management. Particularly noteworthy is the fact

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Insert Table 3 about here

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that while evidence points to problems of stigma in up to 93 percent of the classes, few curriculum materials or strategies are used by teachers to deal with these problems.

According to teacher reports, terms such as dumb, dumb bunny, dum-dum, retard, Z, eddie, and do-do's were among frequently used derisive terms used to describe the special class. The teacher's name,

Table 3

Teacher Perception and Management of Stigma

Question	Percentage Yes Responses		
	Senior High School N = 94	Junior High School N = 129	Elementary N = 94
1. Are you aware of any evidence which indicates that your pupils are ashamed of being in a class for slow learners?*	83	82	51
2. Are you aware of any names or derogatory labels attached to your class or the pupils in it?	80	90	81
3. Have you had discussions with your class about the attitudes of others toward them or the class?	93	93	85
4. Do you ever discuss ways that the children can deal with those who ask about their grade or class placement or the subjects they are taking?	71	74	78
5. Do you use any units or special materials to help your pupils adjust to the fact of their special class placement or to the attitudes of others toward them?	46	43	41

* Slow learner is the Ohio term for educable mentally retarded which was in use when the study was conducted (Spring, 1969).

room number, or the name of the local school for the retarded was also a basis for identifying special class students. The terms were used by regular students, by students of only slightly higher placement, and by the special education students themselves. There were also reports of the derisive terms being used by regular teachers.

As the data in Table 3 reveal, most teachers had held discussions with the students about the attitudes of others toward them or the class. Name calling and ridicule by other (regular) students was the most frequent stimulus for these discussions although incidents sparked by the special class students themselves was also a stimulus in some cases.

Conclusions stemming from these teacher-led discussions included the following:

1. Students should accept themselves--i.e. adjust to others (do the best they can; get a better outlook).
2. Should ignore remarks (or tolerate remarks).
3. Should behave better (as do regular students; "act intelligent").
4. The student has many advantages and positive aspects (i.e. they can learn; they can excel in something; the special education program is good).
5. Note that other persons are ignorant for calling names (also immature; inferior).

There were of course a number of additional reasons given by teachers which defy easy classification. Most striking in all their responses, however, is the uncertainty with which teachers approach this area, and the paucity of validated techniques for dealing with the problem.

Stigma and the post-school adjustment of educable mental retardates. The student labeled educable mentally retarded while in school does not, following graduation or school termination, erase this experience from consciousness. There is evidence that the individual is sensitive to the fact of his former special class placement and that such sensitivity does influence interaction with friends, acquaintances, and potential employers. The extent to which stigma was operating in the lives of former special class students was investigated in one followup study of some 405 individuals who had been eligible for or labeled educable mentally retarded while in school and who had graduated or dropped out of a work study or regular special education program. These individuals were interviewed in their homes by professionally trained interviewers and represent a sample from a pool of 2213 subjects who had been identified as meeting the basic criteria of the study, i.e., (1) be eligible for placement in a special class and (2) eligible for graduation between June 1964 and June 1968. Participants included students from one big city district, and semi-rural and suburban districts (Dyck and Jones, 1969).

One interview question was the following:

> Since you left school, how many people have you told that you were in special classes or a work study program in school?

Of 269 individuals responding to this question, 94, or 35 percent, indicated "anyone who asks" while an equal number (98, or 36 percent) indicated "no one." Seventy-eight or 29 percent of the respondents would confide in a few people. Thus 65 percent of the respondents would tell no one or only a few people of their former special class placement suggesting that it was not a fact of which they were proud.

(The finding could also reflect, of course, the subjects' knowledge that because of potential ridicule and public misunderstanding the fact of former special class placement must be communicated judiciously).

Several other perceptions of the school program reported by former special class students are noteworthy. Four questions were asked about the perceived value of special education in facilitating (or hindering) work and interpersonal adjustment. Responses to the questions are summarized in Table 4 which present results for work study graduates, work study dropouts, special education graduates, and special education dropouts.

Insert Table 4 about here

As can be seen from inspection of the data, when contrasted with special education graduates and dropouts, work study graduates are more likely to report that having been in special education had been helpful. As would be anticipated, fewer special education graduates and dropouts--as contrasted with work study graduates and dropouts--agreed that special class placement had caused problems. In addition, work study graduates, in contrast to other categories of special education students, were more likely to agree that the schools could "help students get better jobs than they would get otherwise." In a somewhat related vein, work study graduates were more likely to report that being in a special program helped "get along better with other people."

Overall the findings reveal that the program was viewed most positively by work-study graduates, and as a rule least positively by special education dropouts. No group however embraced their program wholeheartedly

Table 4

Retardate Evaluation of School Program Helpfulness

Question	Work Study Graduates		Work Study Dropouts		Special Education Graduates		Special Education Dropouts	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Looking back, has being in special education or a work study program been helpful to you? (Yes)	125	58.6	37	49.3	11	44.0	14	34.1
2. Has being in special education or a work study program caused any problems for you? (No)	134	62.9	49	65.3	13	52.0	20	48.7
3. Can schools help students get better jobs than they would get otherwise? (Yes)	143	67.1	46	61.3	13	52.0	22	53.6
4. Did being in special education help you get along better with other people? (Yes)	103	48.3	33	44.0	8	32.0	10	24.3

as revealed by the fact that almost two thirds of the respondents would tell no one or only a few people of their former special class placement, and fewer than half of the respondents believed that the schools had helped to prepare them for effective interpersonal relationships. Moreover, interviewers judged that approximately one-fifth of the respondents showed slight or strong dislike, irritation, and/or embarrassment at being asked the questions about special education.

Final Note

It is apparent that considerable additional work needs to be undertaken in our explorations of the effects of labels and stigma on the special child. It is apparent also, in planning educational programs for exceptional children, that labels and stigma are only two variables among a host of factors to be considered in developing optimum educational placements for the exceptional child. Other variables include the quality of personnel and resources available in the classroom or school building, the child's history of acceptance or rejection, the degree of environmental support available to the child, the kinds of educational alternatives available to the child in the school district, and many other considerations as well. Nothing written here is meant to deny the importance of these considerations. Rather, the point of the paper has been to call attention to two important classes of variables that need to be considered in planning services for exceptional children but which have been, heretofore, neglected; and to provide data which highlight the importance of these variables.

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